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UNCLAS VIENNA 003431

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EUR/AGS (VIKMANIS-KELLER)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SPO WINS ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN VIENNA ELECTIONS

REF: (A) Vienna 3329; (B) Vienna 3269

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¶1. (SBU) On October 23, The Social Democrats (SPO) increased their absolute majority of seats in the state legislature of Vienna (Austria's most populous state), but narrowly missed winning over 50 percent of the popular vote. In the last of three state elections held in October, Chancellor Schuessel's conservative People's Party (OVP) and the Greens also posted modest gains. The Freedom Party (FPO) lost support, but exceeded expectations by capturing nearly 15 percent. The big loser was Joerg Haider's FPO spinoff Alliance Future Austria (BZO), which came in last, after the Austrian Communist Party (KPO).

¶2. (U) vote pct. (change from 2001), seats (change)

SPO	49.0	(+2.1)	55	(+3)
OVP	18.8	(+2.4)	18	(+3)
FPO	14.9	(-5.3)	13	(-8)
Greens	14.7	(+2.2)	14	(+2)
KPO	1.5	(+0.8)	-	-
BZO	1.2	(-)	-	-

Electorate: 1,142,126 Voter Turnout: 60 Percent

¶3. (SBU) The relatively low voter turnout worked to the SPO's disadvantage. Social Democrat voters may have been less motivated because of the apparent certainty of a win. The OVP scored with attractive candidates and attacks against SPO dominance in Vienna. The FPO's sharp-edged anti-immigrant tone helped minimize its losses. The Greens, hampered by lack of a clear line, failed to meet their goal of coming in second. The BZO suffered another state election debacle, with a result below its current national ratings of 2-3 percent.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The October election results weaken the BZO nationally. In particular, there could be an erosion of BZO strength in parliament if its deputies start to drift back to the FPO. With his comparatively good performance in his home state of Vienna, national FPO chairman Karl Heinz Strache has consolidated his position and increased the FPO's chances of becoming the sole right-of-center survivor of last spring's FPO/BZO split. The BZO's prospects of entering parliament in

national elections in fall 2006 appear cloudy at best.

Van Voorst